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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5276

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS BAGHDAD 000143

SIPDIS

DEPT OF AGRICULTURE PASS TO USAID

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: NINEWA: DROUGHT THREATENS ALREADY STRESSED FARM SECTOR

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

#### Summary

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**¶1.** (SBU) A late start to the rainy season in the northern Iraqi province of Nineva threatens the province's wheat crop and sheep herds in an agricultural economy already suffering from tight credit, a lack of fuel and security constraints on marketing. While rains usually begin in late October in this potentially productive grain-farming province, Nineva has received only one day of significant rainfall since September. Normal rainfall over this period is on average 4.2 inches, but this year's rainfall since September has been no more than one-quarter that amount. The PRT is working closely with local partners on a long-term transition to sustainable agriculture, a sector that could provide rural employment and raw materials for a thriving food-processing industry. For this season, though, nothing short of an immediate infusion of water and forage would reverse the effects of the current drought. End Summary.

#### Wheat Planting Reduced, Low Germination Expected

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**¶2.** (SBU) Early estimates from farmers across the province, local and provincial agricultural officials, and Provincial Reconstruction Team agricultural advisors are that the rains' delay has prompted wheat farmers this year to plant 15-30 percent less land than usual. The lack of rainfall during the crucial post-planting period may reduce germination of this year's already below-average crop by at least 50 percent. Farmers said they need rain by the middle of March to germinate and sustain any of the seeds they planted this season.

#### Sheep Herds Lack Forage

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**¶3.** (SBU) A lack of rain is squeezing sheep herders as well. Normal fall and winter forage did not materialize due to the last four months' dry weather. With the current sub-freezing night-time temperatures across Nineva, meaningful amounts of forage are now not expected until at least March. Farmers told the PRT that they expect many sheep could die of malnutrition before adequate forage is available.

PRT Pursuing GOI, Private Farm Solutions

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**¶4.** (SBU) The PRT is pursuing several projects to address the credit, fuel and security constraints on Nineva's farm sector. These initiatives include multi-sectarian rural farm associations to share risk on common problems like high input prices, expansion of local veterinary programs, increased access to micro-loans, and business improvement loans for agricultural processors. Unfortunately, none of these can address the short-term lack of rain.

Comment

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**¶5.** (SBU) The lack of rains in Nineva harms a local agricultural economy already depressed by tight credit, a lack of fuel and security constraints on marketing. While some parts of the province could farm wheat and barley with only rain, others depend on the marginally operational Al Jazeera Irrigation System and expensive individual pumps. While rains are the only full solution to a failing wheat crop and starving sheep, stop-gap measures could include increased fuel resources for private irrigation pumps, improved veterinary care to combat malnutrition-related diseases and delivery of forage from overseas markets. In the long-term, a multi-year transition of marginal cropland to pastureland would provide farmers a profitable way to use their land without relying on rains to grow grain.

CROCKER